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STATE FOR AF/C, EUR/UBI

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TAGS: PREL PGOV KDEM CG UK

SUBJECT: (C) DRC: OKITUNDU ASSAULTED IN LONDON; FCO EXPLAINS KINSHASA DRAWDOWN

REF: EMAILS TNABER - RBELL 10/12/06

Classified By: PolMinCouns Maura Connelly; reason 1.4 (b, d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Leonard She Okitundu, chief of staff to DRC President Kabila, was assaulted in London October 11 by Congolese expatriates whose affiliation is not yet clear. He was beaten, stripped and robbed, and photos of his possessions were posted on the internet. He and his companions have all been discharged from hospital. The DRC Embassy had not been officially notified of his visit to London, and neither it nor FCO knew about the TV interview to which he was going when attacked. FCO alerted the DRC Embassy as soon as it learned of the incident. Regarding published complaints from Okitundu that HMG did nothing to help him, FCO points out that it did everything the DRC Embassy asked of it. The police responded to the scene of the attack and are conducting a full investigation. FCO believes it has successfully cleared the air with the GDRC and does not expect the incident to have lasting repercussions. Separately, FCO stresses that its drawdown in Kinshasa is a precautionary measure taken after extensive consultations with partners, and that the UK remains fully committed to the success of the DRC electoral process. FCO is concerned that Kabila has named military officers to fill the civilian posts of Minister of Interior and Governor of Kinshasa. END SUMMARY.

(U) OKITUNDU ASSAULT

¶2. (C) FCO Great Lakes Section Head Rachel Brass briefed Poloff October 13 on the October 11 attack in London on DRC President Kabila's Chief of Staff Leonard She Okitundu. As Okitundu was arriving at the studio of Original Black Entertainment TV in Park Royal (northwest London) for a live interview that evening, he and his companions (his party's UK chairman Placide Mbatika and former ambassador Henri Nswana) were assaulted by Congolese expatriates who beat them with a baseball bat. Okitundu was also stripped and robbed, and photos of his possessions were later posted to the internet to humiliate him. The Guardian newspaper reported the incident October 13, quoting Okitundu as complaining that he had been forced to wait several hours at the hospital before receiving medical attention and that "the Foreign Office have done nothing to help me." A spokeswoman for the Central Middlesex Hospital said he was "treated appropriately in a consulting room." Okitundu was less badly injured than his companions. All three victims were discharged from hospital by the afternoon of October 12.

¶3. (C) Brass stressed that FCO had done all it could and that the DRC Embassy had not asked it to do anything more.

She said she had been the one who informed the Congolese Ambassador (who is affiliated with the RCD party, i.e. neither with Kabila nor with his presidential run-off rival Bemba) that Okitundu and his delegation were in town in the first place. The delegation had met with the UK's All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on the Great Lakes, and had just finished meeting with Brass and her boss, Southern Africa Department Deputy Head Nick Cannon. As the delegation was leaving, Brass asked where they were going next, and the delegation replied that they were headed to Brussels. Thus, neither FCO nor the DRC Embassy knew they were in fact going to a TV station. Members of the Congolese expatriate community, however, would have known the time and place, because the TV station had advertised for the previous two days that Okitundu would be coming for a live interview. The police were not on hand because the crowd waiting at the station did not constitute a licensed demonstration, and neither the delegation nor the DRC Embassy had requested a police presence.

¶4. (C) Brass said that as soon as she learned of the assault, she called the DRC Ambassador who sent a team to look after the delegation's needs, but the DRC mission never made any requests of FCO. Brass added that FCO quickly got in touch with the GDRC in Kinshasa to explain the situation. She assessed that the air was now clear between the two governments; she did not expect the incident to have lasting repercussions.

¶5. (C) The police responded appropriately to the "999" call made by someone on the scene, and are conducting a full investigation. The Guardian quotes Eric Joyce MP, chairman of the APPG, as presuming the attackers were "loyal to Bemba," but according to Brass, it is not yet clear what their affiliation or motive was, though there seems to be no doubt that they were Congolese.

(U) BEMBA DELEGATION

¶6. (C) On October 10, a delegation of Bemba supporters had met in London with FCO and with the Great Lakes APPG. Brass said none of the meetings with either delegation featured anything new: FCO reiterated "the standard core group points" and each delegation complained about the rival camp's behavior, particularly misuse of the media.

(U) UK DRAWDOWN

¶7. (C) Turning to the UK's recent decision to draw down "non-essential" staff and dependents from its embassy in Kinshasa, Brass told Poloff she was aware of unhappiness about a perceived lack of consultation. She insisted that the UK had consulted extensively since August with the U.S., Canada and European missions in Kinshasa, both bilaterally and together. She stressed that, contrary to what was claimed in a European Commission document, the final decision was not taken until October 5, by minister for Africa Lord Triesman. Once the decision was taken, the UK's no-double-standard rule (which not all European countries have) precluded giving partners advance notice. The drawdown was a precautionary measure only, and in no way signified any lessening of the UK's strong commitment to the electoral process in the DRC. Indeed, Brass noted, the UK is the largest bilateral donor to that process. The drawdown only affects four staff, all from the Department for International Development, who - Brass insisted - are able to accomplish their work from London. Furthermore, the UK still intends to send observers for the presidential run-off election.

(C) WORRIES ABOUT MILITARY IN CIVILIAN POSTS

¶8. (C) Turning to the situation on the ground in the DRC, Brass expressed worry about the PPRD (Kabila's party) decision this week to nominate military officers for the

civilian posts of Minister of Interior and Governor of Kinshasa.

¶9. (C) COMMENT: Cannon will participate in the October 17 video teleconference on the DRC, at which concerns about the electoral process will be discussed. Based on discussions with Brass, we expect that one particular concern of Cannon's will be the need to press for agreement on the arrangements for the loser of the presidential run-off, to try to pre-empt any inclination to reject the political process and resume hostilities.

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